

Simple Gifts

American Shaker Hymn

F F F

'Tis a gift to be sim-ple, 'Tis a gift to be free, 'Tis a

C7 C7 F

gift to come down where we ought to be, And when we find our - selves in the

F C7 F

place just right, It will be in the val - ley of love and de-light.

F F F

When true sim - plic - i - ty is gained, To bow and to bend we

C7 F F

shan't be a-shamed, To turn, turn will be our de-light, Till by

C7 F F

turn - ing, turn - ing we come round right.

Accompaniment voice chords

F C

loo. loo.

SINGING

Introduce this song first by giving students information about Shakers. This religious group wrote thousands of songs, but this is probably the best known. The principles of their religion included love, peace, purity, justice, and simplicity. If you have a recording of this song, let the students listen to the recording. (It can be found in both the Silver Burdette and Macmillan music series.) If not, sing all the way through the song. Discuss the words. The Shakers got their name because of their movements and dancing during worship so the “turn, turn” refers to these movements. This song is best taught a phrase at a time. Shaping the phrase with large semi-circle hand motions may help give the students the connected feeling of the phrase. When the students are very familiar with the song, you can have some students sing a chord accompaniment on a “loo” syllable while others sing the melody. (See music.)

PLAYING/MOVING

This song can be easily accompanied with an autoharp, or a dulcimer to provide a simple authentic style accompaniment. The Shakers were known for their dancing, but they did not dance in partners. Dancing in trios with the men and women separated was most common.

Movement: Form rows of three boys and girls. **In measures 1-16** take three steps forward then close. Circle in place to right four steps. Take three steps back and close. Circle in place to left four steps. **In measures 17-32** step-close-step twice to the rhythm of two eighths-quarter note. Bow for two beats and straighten for two beats. Circle in place to right four steps. Circle left four beats.

LISTENING

American composer Aaron Copland used this tune in his ballet score Appalachian Spring. Once the students know the song, they will enjoy listening to it in the suite. The action of the ballet, set in Pennsylvania in the spring, centers around a new farmhouse. The “Simple Gifts” theme which comes in the form of theme and variations occurs near the end. Have the students listen and discuss ways Copland varied the theme to create interest. He changes instrumentation, dynamics, tempo, rhythm and harmonies. Help the students make a listening map of the song, notating ways Copland changed the tune with each variation. **Composition outline...** *Theme:* Clarinet solo with flute *Bridge Variation 1:* duet by oboe & bassoon *Bridge Variation 2:* augmented theme (doubling of note values) done in canon format *Bridge Variation 3:* brass with march-like feel & fast notes in violin *Bridge Variation 4:* full orchestra, majestic with augmentation *Coda:* slower & more peaceful

CREATING

Have the students create their own theme and variation piece. Divide the class into small groups and give each group at least one instrument that can play a melody like piano, tone bells, recorder, or xylophones and some percussion instruments. Choose a simple tune like “Twinkle, twinkle” or “Hot Cross Buns”. Let the students make up one or two variations.

CURRICULUM CONNECTION: (Social Studies/Language Arts)

Learn about the Shakers. They were well known for the high quality of their crafts. Today the simple lines of their furniture are still very popular. Locate pictures of Shaker furniture, buildings, and crafts. Have students draw pictures of one of the items. Write stories about the item from the point of view of the item itself...how it came to be, how it was used, how it “feels” now.